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American Beauty Standards: “Paling” in Comparison to the White Norm

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Recommended Citation

Marrinan, Kristen, "American Beauty Standards: “Paling” in Comparison to the White Norm" (2019). *Sociology Senior Seminar Papers*. 22.

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RUNNING HEAD = AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

**American Beauty Standards:
“Paling” in Comparison to the White Norm.**

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Word Count: 7,746

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American Beauty Standard: “Paling” in Comparison to the White Norm.

America has a culturally accepted norm of what makes someone beautiful. A standard that is hard to meet. Being light-skinned, blonde and blue-eyed is the benchmark of beauty, of what is most desirable. But is that really what it takes to be attractive in America? This research examines the relationship between race, birth-place, ethnicity and self-rated attractiveness. The General Social Survey (2016) provides the quantitative data for this study. While past literature explores the connections between identity, self-esteem, and attractiveness, it does not explore the intersection of different identifying characteristics. Group position and Colourism approaches provide the theoretical foundations for the hypothesis and the research conducted in this paper. These theories also help explain why certain physical attributes are more valuable in American society. So how does the privileging of White America, specifically when measuring beauty, influence one’s opinion of their own attractiveness? This study has 1,622 respondents—non-institutionalized, English or Spanish speaking adults, who live in the country. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the individual and collaborative relationships between the variables. The results from this study concur with some of findings from the literature. Yet, they do not support the hypotheses. The results concluded that being Non-White had little influence on one's self-rated attractiveness. Similarly, birthplace and ethnicity had no statistical significance. However, the controls, age and sex, are significant. This research explores the role identity plays in one’s view of their own beauty. Especially during a period of controversial leadership and drastic shifts in the social norms of society.

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

Beauty standards in America have strict expectations of what physical attractiveness should be. Beauty norms have changed over the course of human history. In the United States, the beauty standard has had trends of features and fads of body types that classify a person as conventionally attractive in the eyes of the masses. During the past two centuries, women like Marilyn Monroe and Kate Moss and men including Marlon Brando and Brad Pitt have dominated the accepted realm of attractiveness because of their abnormal superior looks. Though these examples are of what is considered beautiful, the normal American does not and cannot fit the criteria of this standard. Americans, specifically the youth, idealize and fantasize about what they would be if they were prettier or skinnier. But what does it actually mean to beautiful in American society? What are the expectations placed upon people to classify them as attractive?

Other countries have set their own standard for beauty and their society is attempting to live up to those. But what happened when cultures and identities merge into a society with an established standard? When people from different identities and races immigrate and start to build lives in America, they are constantly reminded of their differences by the media, advertising campaigns and socially constructed expectations. For decades, identifying as White and with a Western culture, and more importantly appearing as such, was considered beautiful and those that did not were “unattractive”.

Today, Americans are bombarded with images of the White standard, despite a social movement towards diversification and acceptance. Specific companies, such as Dove and Aerie, have launched campaigns that are more inclusive of all body types, gender, disability and races. Previous research discusses the financial benefits of being an attractive person in the business world (Kuwabara and Thébaud 2017) and the social and educational benefits (Urbatsch 2018; Mulford, Orbell, Shatto and Stockhard 1998). “Physical attractiveness is a major asset in sexual

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

exchange and is associated with upward economic mobility in particular for females... and we also know that it brings substantial economic gains in the labor market” (Mulford et al. 1998; 1,566). Furthermore, much of literature discusses the consequences of being different from the standard. Western society holds beauty as a high form of cultural capital—a defining feature of a person that can increase their opportunity to achieve success. So, when one’s identity influences their perception of their own beauty, their opportunities and chances for success may actually be lower. The root of the problem stems with how beauty has been idealized to the generalized public and how the perception of attractiveness is damaging to those that do not relate or identify as that. The beauty expectation that has been normalized in America is a problem that society is continually facing. Even though the efforts made by the upcoming generations and name brand companies to challenge the standard and accept different identities for being beautiful.

One single form of beauty is an intangible concept for an entire society to grasp, or more simply: "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" (Hungerford 1878). But what does it mean to be an attractive American? How do people of all races and ethnic identities perceive their own beauty in the shadow of normalized exceptions? Many people would associate themselves in the "normal" or "regular" attractiveness category. Yet there seems to be a distinct disparity between the different identities—race and culture—and the perception of their own beauty in America. Possibly due to the expectations of black women in American culture, the lack of diversity in the spotlight or the controversial political climate which we live in.

Similarly, American culture has been spread throughout the world, and thus, has successfully spread the unrealistic beauty standards that Americans idolize. Yet, it seems, that the challenge for society—people accepting their own beauty and comparing themselves to others—is repeatedly encouraged and enforced by American culture. Thus, I hypothesize people

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

born in the United States and identify as White and with a Western culture will rate themselves as more attractive than those who are not born in the United States and identify as Non-White and with a Non-Western culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three factors have remained constant throughout the twists and turns of beauty expectations. The first being the ideal figures presented by society, are not representative of the bodies of most women. Second, most women have invested a significant amount of time, energy and money in an attempt to conform to these expectations. Finally, the female body is constantly scrutinized and compared to the standard by men and other women (Forbes et al. 2007). These three constants have created immense amounts of body dissatisfaction, almost to the extent of normative discontent, meaning that being unhappy with one's body has become popularized (Rodin, Silberstein and Striegel-Moore 1984).

Defining the variances between Non-Western and Western identities is crucial to understanding the beauty standards of different cultures. Western culture is comprised of Western European countries and North America, along with some other countries (Carneiro, Zeytinoglu, Hort and Wilkins 2013). Beauty standards in the Western World are shaped through different catalysts: "standards of Western beauty dictate that women are largely valued by their attractiveness...women's worth is primarily measure by how well they fit into the standards of beauty created in Western society" (Carneiro et al. 2013:81; Wolf 1991). The Western European and American standards that have come to dominate beauty norms are prevalent in the media, consumer products and, now, in our political offices—the standard being "White porcelain skin, blue eyes, and slim figures" and thin noses and lips (Carneiro et al. 2013:81; Bryant 2013). Similarly, "Western standards of female beauty have included the slender and flat-chested

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

flappers of 1920s, the voluptuous “sweater girls” of the 1940s, the nearly emaciated supermodels of the 1970s, and the curvaceously thin beauty icons of the 1990s” (Forbes, Collinsworth, Jobe, Braun and Wise 2007:265). These specific and ever-changing expectations have led women globally to develop eating disorders, poor self-esteem, and mental health issues (Carneiro et al. 2013). Race, nationality, and environment affect an individual’s self-esteem and body image. Thus these three themes will potentially effect one’s perception of themselves.

Race and Beauty

The relationship between race and beauty is complicated, and frankly, understudied across the broad spectrum that influences beauty standards. Race has been a vital factor that has determined the treatment of cultures for centuries. Violence, specifically sexual violence against Black women and other women of color, has historically had two possible results during the enslavement of many people in America’s past. Those outcomes are mixed-race children and the systematic favoring of lighter-skinned people of colour (Rockquemore 2002: 488). Rockquemore continually comments on how lighter-skinned Blacks, during slavery, were accorded with more privileges, like household duties, educational opportunities and less violent treatment by the overseers (2002; Hunter 2007). This branched into two standards of attractiveness for Black women in America in the 20th century: “(1) ‘good’ (White) features—straight and/or long hair, a small nose, thin lips, and light eyes— and ‘bad’ (Black) features—short or kinky hair, full lips, and a wide nose...” (Rockquemore 2002:488). Bryant (2013) mentions that women with very dark skin, because they deviate the farthest from the European standard, are more likely to experience self-hatred and distorted body image. Beauty standards, in general, are more directly applied to women than men. Rockquemore’s (2002) interpretation of skin color stratification among Black women, is a distinctly gendered problem. Stemming from the abuse of enslaved

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

Black women, and continues today as an emphasis on what is beautiful in the Black community (Rockquemore 2002). Rockquemore writes:

Black women, held to a European standard of beauty, are socially and psychologically affected by skin color stratification.... Lighter skinned women, whose desirability stems from their close physical approximation of the White beauty standard...have higher educational attainment and personal incomes...are perceived as being more successful...and are considered both more desirable as mates and more likely to marry a high-status man than are dark-skinned women... (2002: 489).

This information being presented by Rockquemore (2002) is vital to self-perception of beauty by American Black women and Black culture. The expectations of society and the lengths that people go too in order to conform to the standard, either with plastic surgery or other cosmetic work, is enforcing a culture of comparison and homogenization. In collaboration with the findings from Darlow et al. (2010) and Molloy et al. (1998), the research is showing the detrimental effects of comparison, between age, racial and ethnic categories, on individuals in American society.

The American beauty industry caters to lighter complexions. Magazines, campaigns and society seemingly privilege those that fit their aesthetic desire. Much of the previous research conducted around the topic of American beauty standards discusses self-esteem in respect to one's identity. Race and gender have been found to play major roles in the way that one feels about their attractiveness (Sprecher, Brooks and Avogo 2013; Hesse-Biber, Livingstone, Ramirez, Bracko and Johnson 2010; Backman and Adams 1991; Glapka and Majali 2017).

Sprecher et al. (2013) examines self-esteem in college aged, Black men and women finding that when compared to White students, Black students had ratings higher self-esteem than their White peers (Sprecher et al. 2013). Contradictory to those findings, Hesse-Biber et al. (2010) found a wide range of self-esteem ratings among Black women at predominately White institutions.

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

Sprecher and her colleagues also discuss findings that concluded that the gap between self-esteem gaps between Black and White women were larger than that between men (2013).

In America, there is a clear distinction between gender and the wage gap, when race is also factored in Black Americans are compensated much less than others (Mandel and Semyonov 2016). Economic disparity could also contribute to the unrealistic expectations placed on beauty standards, Elizabeth McClintock (2014) suggests,

Income may help individuals purchase goods and services that enhance attractiveness such as dental care and gym membership. Some of the beauty-status correlation might be explained by rater bias: for example, individuals thought to be of a higher status nations are rated more favorably...(578).

Mandel and Semyonov (2016) found that in 2010 the wage gap between Black and White women was in favor of White women. Also, a Black women's gross earnings declined after a three-year increase, resulting in them having less economic security and freedom. Which McClintock (2014) pointed to as being a factor that helps women appease to and assimilate with the beauty standard. The longitudinal data collected showed that during the early 2000s (2000-2010) Black men and women experienced a significant drop in weekly compensation compared to White men and women—Black men were making approximately \$650 per week; Black women were making \$550 and White females made about \$630; White men, the most privileged group, were making about \$900 (Mandel and Semyonov 2016). The significant differences between wages can contribute to the lack of self-esteem and the perception of what it takes to be beautiful, as McClintock (2014) mentioned, it could result in the difference of having a gym membership or dental care that makes someone beautiful in the eyes of another or to themselves compared to one who can afford these luxuries.

Women with darker-skin tones have more trouble finding partners and that males are more likely to prefer dating women with lighter complexions suggests Bryant (2013). Similarly,

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

women with lighter skin are considered to be a prize by Black men who recognize there are social and economic advantages to having a lighter skinned wife (Bryant 2013). As a result, women with darker-skin tones are most likely to remain unmarried (Bryant 2013; Robinson-Moore 2008). “Individuals’ sense of race as a contingency of self-worth can have important implications for the extent to which they become vulnerable to White Western norms of beauty and body image dissatisfaction” (Hesse-Biber et al. 2010: 709). Black women may encounter severe long-term mental health problems due to idealization of lighter-skin tones (Bryant 2013).

The comparison of beauty ideals is not just Black and White. The western influence on beauty is prevalent in Asian cultures as well. In Japan, the media has been influenced by Western beauty norms and the presence of Western ideals is not new. Darling-Wolf (2004) mentions how Japanese women, while under American occupation, internalized Westernized ideals of female attractiveness. Japanese women began to wear mini-skirts, permed hair and familiarized themselves with White features (Darling-Wolf 2004). Similarly, “For Asian Americans with a European colonial history, like Indians, Vietnamese, or Filipinos, light skin tone is valued because of the European values enforced by the colonial regime...” (Hunter 2007; 239). Showing that the influence of Western culture on societies is still prevalent in the perception of what is beautiful in Asian countries, despite no longer being a colony of “Whiter” countries. This translated for many colonized countries, including many in Central and South America. Mexico, has a history of struggling with racial segregation and colonization, the “colour-caste system” allocated more and better resources to those with a more desirable skin tone (Hunter 2007).

Weight, Age and Society

Another factor that can influence self-esteem is weight. The idolization of the “perfectly” thin body has been a problem for many Americans (Darlow and Lobel 2010; Forbes et al. 2007;

Thornton and Maurice 1997). Darlow et al. (2010) conducted a study about the comparison between women, in which they discovered that overweight women tend to feel more insecure than normal weight women in a situation where they will not be compared to another. However, in a situation where women have the potential to be compared, overweight and normal weight women are equally critical of themselves—reflective comparison—showing that women often compare themselves to each other (Darlow et al. 2010). Literature points to Black women's perceptions of beauty as being more flexible and fluid than White women; that they are less concerned with their weight and the perception of their weight (Allan, Mayo and Michel 1993; Kumnyika, Wilson and Guilford-Davenport 1993; Akan and Grilo 1995; Rucker and Cash 1992). This could in part be attributed to what they believe romantic partners want. White women tend to believe partners want skinner frames, while Black women believe partners prefer larger and curvier frames (Molloy and Herzberger 1998). In Japan, when interviewed about what they found attractive in women often stated a specific body part or they mentioned the female body as a whole—“breasts (the bigger the better), legs (the longer the better), or face (the lighter the better)” (Darling-Wolf 2004:334).

Age is a dominating force in the perception of one's attractiveness level. Society privileges youth, thus judging women by their looks has created a double standard of aging (England et al. 2009). England et al. (2009) suggests that men have preference for women that are younger because of a “result of evolution selecting on male preferences that increase the probability that he will have offspring; given fecundity difference by age, selecting a younger partner increases the likelihood that he will have children” (England et al. 2009). Robinson-Moore (2008) found that those that do not fit the norm of beautiful are often alienated and can even cause higher dropout rates amongst young Black adolescent females. In school, there was

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

not much variation between the self-esteem of middle school aged children, however, when researching children and their home life, children that come from broken homes are significantly less confident than their peers (Simmons et al. 1978). Simmons et al. (1978), despite this being an older study, found that Black students from broken homes in desegregated schools have lower self-esteem than their peers, yet students in segregated districts show no difference. Similarly, “exposure to and identification with portrayals of black women as sex objects contribute to the emphasis that black adolescent girls place on appearance in their own lives” (Bryant 2013:83). This illustrates the influence that culture has on the social pressures of being attractive.

Depending on the environment in which one is in, their opinion of themselves can be drastically different from other settings. Two factors, such as social media usage and one’s learning environment, influence their opinions and actions of how they treat and see their beauty. Previous studies have provided significant evidence that the surroundings to which one is raised or resides in influences their opinion of themselves. (Darling-Wolf 2004; Hesse-Biber et al. 2010; Spencer, Barrett, Storti and Cole 2013). Many studies have been conducted in college settings on how the exposure to advertisements and the comparison between individuals can enhance or adversely, take a toll on one’s self-esteem (Hesse-Biber et al. 2010; Darlow et al. 2010; Skorek and Dunham 2012; England and McClintock 2009). In college, it is much more salient for women to compare and attempt to adhere to the thinness standards set for women than men (Darlow et al. 2010). Susan Bryant (2013) wrote:

Black women today are subjected to incessant messages about European ideals of beauty through family, peers, partners, the media, and larger society. If young Black women stand in contrast to what society dictates as attractive, they may find it difficult to grow to accept themselves. As a result, the internalization of racialized beauty standards can perpetuate into a lifelong, intergenerational culture of self-hatred... (81).

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

Women and men of different races and ethnicities are comparing themselves to a standard that is biologically unattainable for them to achieve. Because within communities of colour idolize the American entertainment industry and Western media they are struck with the White beauty norms, people are constantly comparing themselves to a Western, or European White, ideal (Darling-Wolf 2004).

In a society that values attractiveness as highly as American culture, all aspects of life seem to revolve around one's outward appearance. For example, one's beauty can influence the amount of occupational and academic opportunities they are given (Bryant 2013; Rockquemore 2002). But because the Western European standard is what many perceive as attractive, many women and men are at a disadvantage due to their race, ethnicity or simply features that do not put them at the White standard (Bryant 2013). Finally, beauty standards in America are facing a battle of inequality and inequity. Men and women, who do not fit the White standard, face inequality in the number of opportunities given to them, thus in turn providing inequities in their day-to-day life, effecting the diversification of beauty in America and of their own beauty.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The foundation of study is based upon two theories—group position theory and Colourism. With these theories driving the thought behind the hypothesis, I hope to discover what aspects of identity truly effect one's perception of their own beauty.

Group Position Theory

Herbert Blumer (1958) composed a theory discussing racial prejudice and its relationship with group position. In this he states “this customary way of viewing race prejudice overlooks and obscures the fact that the race prejudice is fundamentally a matter of relationship between racial groups” (3). Blumer (1958) continues to discuss that racially privileged groups think of

themselves as belonging to that group. Implying that this group prejudices and assigns people to other racial groups. In terms of the research conducted in this paper, group position theory places the White European looking Americans at the top of social hierarchy and the rest of the racial categories come subsequent. Being able to identify with a group that prejudices others is not inevitable, its learned from experience, from socialization, according to Blumer (1958). “To characterize another racial group is, by opposition, to define one’s own group” (Blumer 1958:4).

Being a part of the dominant racial group provides its members with a self-assured feeling of being naturally superior to others (Blumer 1958). The dominant group looks down upon subordinate groups as alien, “fundamentally different stock”, or “they are not our kind” (Blumer 1958:4). Blumer defines the majority as having four features; feeling superior, subordinate group is intrinsically different or alien, a proprietary claim over specific rights, statuses and resources, and finally the perception of the subordinate group threatening the dominant group’s prerogatives (Bobo 1999). In American society, the beauty standards emphasize White attractiveness, White Americans have long held a “superior” status especially in the public eye, for example actors and actresses or models, even politics. If White America is constantly being depicted and told they are superior, there is an expectation in society, that they are.

Colourism

The American standard for beauty solely idolizes White beauty. Simply this is a form colorism—or the giving of privileges to lighter-skinned people (Hunter 2007). As discussed previously, “Lighter skinned people of color enjoy substantial privileges that are unattainable to their darker skinned brothers and sisters” (Hunter 2007:1). Colourism is concerned with skin tone, rather than one’s race. However, applied within the context of identifying as black, but

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

because black men and women that appear to be “whiter” have more social privileges, whiteness is then prioritized as being attractive, more successful and thus more valuable. Colourism has contributed to inequality in American culture from the beginning of the slave trade, attributing darker skin to having lower intelligence, lacking civility, and being less human (Perry, Stevens-Watkins and Oser 2013). “In the U.S. ... lighter skin is perceived as more attractive than darker skin and Afrocentric characteristics by the majority of Americans, regardless of race...” (Perry et al. 2016:6). And in some cases, can result in a decrease in racist and sexist experiences (Perry et al. 2016: Hunter 2007). Colourism is influential in the foundation of American culture, manipulating the outcomes for many Americans; socially, career-wise, educationally, romantically and many more. In relation to this research, Colourism provides support to group position theory. Substantiating the evidence that identifying as White provides privilege, White is beautiful, White is better. And so, for this study group position and Colourism theories are the foundation of the hypothesis. They support the research by providing an explanation and thought pathway for the racial hierarchy system in America and the impact on one’s self perceived attractiveness.

RESEARCH METHODS

Identity is a point of self-identification, when asked to describe one’s self, many times physical features are the first to be described—skin, hair, eye colour being among the popular responses. Using information from the General Social Survey 2016 data set (Smith et al. 1972-2016), this research explores the relationship of one’s race and ethnic identity on their self-perceived rating of attractiveness.

The independent variables include whether or not the respondent was born in the United States of America and their race and ethnic identity. The respondent’s physical attractiveness

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

rating is the dependent variable. The unit of analysis for this research is a sample of randomly selected individuals, from the nationally representative group of United States residing non-institutionalized, English or Spanish speaking adults. For more information, visit the General Social Survey, data explorer (2016) website for an in-depth analysis of the variables used in this research (<http://gss.norc.org/>).

In this research, the independent variables from the General Social Survey (Smith et al. 2016) are used to establish how one identifies. Respondents were asked “Were you born in this country? My other independents were more concise; “Race of Respondent” and “First ethnicity mentioned”. The dependent variable for this specific research asked the respondents of the General Social Survey (2016), “How physically attractive is the respondent?” and allowed them to rank themselves on a scale of one to five—one being very unattractive, unattractive, about average, attractive, and very attractive. The controls variables, used helped identify a person further, are very important to the relationship of self-perceived beauty; “Sex of respondent” and “Respondent’s Age” (Smith et al. Codebook 2017).

For all five of variables in this research, missing data was excluded by selecting the valid responses and separating them—some respondents opted not answer specific questions thus there were some missing cases. Similarly, some variables were dummied or recoded in order to work within the parameters of this study and so the results were comprehensible to all. The variables “Were you born in this country? Race of respondent?” were nominal variables that needed to be dummied—not born in this country was coded as one, as was respondent identifies as Non-White. This was in order to provide a reference category in order to compare the desired group of study—in this instance, Non-Western, Non-White, Non-US-born identifying respondents, to the White, Western and American born respondents. “First ethnicity mentioned” variable was

recoded from a variety of different countries and continents, into whether or not that identity was considered Western or not—Non-Western coded as one. After dummifying “Sex of Respondent”, female coded as one, and factoring in the “Respondent’s Age” the final number of valid cases for this research totaled 1,622 responses (N=1,622).

FINDINGS

Univariate Findings

After successfully narrowing down the valid cases for this study, a univariate analysis was conducted to see how the variables individually broke down. The independent variables, “Were you born in this country?”, Race of Respondent, and if the respondent identifies with a Western or Non-Western culture yielded expected results. 13 percent of the respondents answered that they were not born in this country—87 percent were (Figure 1). The mean for this variable is nearly .1 and the standard deviation for this variable is about .3 (Table 1).

****Figure 1 about here****

****Table 1 about here****

In Figure 2, approximately, 25 percent of the respondents identified as being Non-White, the mean of this variable being .3 and the standard deviation was roughly .4 (Table 1). Lastly, the average response was around .7, meaning that many respondents identify with a Western culture (Table 1) and nearly 30 percent of the respondent’s categorized themselves as being from a Non-Western culture (Figure 3).

****Figure 2 about here****

****Table 1 about here****

****Figure 3 about here****

The self-reported attractiveness level of the respondent yielded a normal distribution of responses, having the most replies in the “about average” category—almost 55 percent (Figure 4). A very small percentage of respondents (approximately 2 percent) categorized themselves as “very unattractive”. Similarly, a small number of people ranked themselves in the highest category; “very attractive”—7 percent. Having the majority of respondents rating themselves as “about average” is not surprising as much of the literature has suggested that many people only compare themselves to those in their immediate surroundings or cohort (Darlow et al. 2010; Molloy et al, 1998). The mean of this variable is about 3, which is reiterated by Figure 4, as “about average” being the most popular answer, which also is the median: 3 (Table 1). The standard deviation is approximately .8 (Table 1).

****Figure 4 about here****

****Table 1 about here****

The control variables for this research are the age of the respondent and the sex of the respondent, both vital when studying the perception of attractiveness. Women constitute about 55 percent of the responses and men are approximately 45 percent (Figure 6). The average age and median of the respondents was nearly 49 years old (Table 1), but there were respondents across all the age groups—19 percent aged from 18 to 30, 33 percent from 31-50, 36 percent from 51-70 and finally, 12 percent from 71 upwards (Figure 5).

****Figure 6 about here****

****Table 1 about here****

****Figure 5 about here****

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

Bivariate Findings

There was no statistically significant relationship regarding a relationship between the independent variables—Non-White, Non-Western, and not born in the US— with the dependent variable—R's physical attractiveness rating—at the $p < .01$ level. However, there was a statistically significant relationship between one's age and sex and their perception of their own attractiveness. Furthermore, there were a number of other statistically significant relationships between the different independent variables and controls. Thus, the bivariate analysis for this data yield a result that refuted the hypothesis.

According to the data (Table 2), a female's relationship with their self-rated attractiveness is a very weak, positive, statistically significant relationship $r = .1$. Meaning that if the respondent identifies as female they are more likely, by a slight amount, to rate themselves as more attractive compared to male respondents. On another note, the age of the respondent has a very weak, negative, statistically significant relationship with self-perceived attractiveness at nearly $-.2$ (Table 2). This is indicating that the older one gets the less attractive they believe they are.

****Table 2 about here****

Despite no relationship between the one's self rated attractiveness and their race, there is a noteworthy relationship between identifying as Non-Western and if the respondent was not born in the United States and the independent and control variables. For example, there is a weak, positive statistically significant relationship between identifying as Non-Western and birth-place—approximately $.2$ (Table 2). This depicts if the respondent identifies as Non-Western one is more likely to not have been born in the United States. Similarly, Table 2 also shows, there is a positive, statistically significant, moderate to strong relationship between being

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

Non-Western and Non-White. Meaning that if one classifies as Non-White they are about .6 points more likely to identify with a Non-Western ethnicity. Being Non-White was also correlated with being born outside the United States of America— by about .2 points, a positive statistically significant, weak relationship. Furthermore, there are a few negative, statistically significant, very weak relationships regarding age and some of the other variables. This shows that the older one gets the more likely they are to be Western, born in America, or White (Table 2). As mentioned above, unfortunately, this bivariate analysis does not support the hypothesis. However, there are some notable relationships between the variables that indicate an association between them.

****Table 2 about here****

Multivariate Findings:

The multivariate regression for this research concurs with the findings from the bivariate analysis. The R^2 of this equation is 5.1%. Which means that about 5% of the variation in this model can be explained by the independent and control variables and the F-Test— $F(5,1616)=17.36$ —shows that this is different from the y-intercept model (Table 3). This regression equation is statistically significant. This model is significant at the $p>.01$ level. The regression coefficients for the independent and dependent variables are not statistically significant. But, similar to the bivariate analysis this regression, shows that the control variables, Women are .2 of a point higher than men and Age is about -.01 (Table 3). Meaning that if you are female you are more likely to rank yourself about two points higher on the self-perceived attractiveness scale. Also, that the older one gets they, on average, rank themselves nearly a tenth of a point lower for each year. Concluding that this multivariate regression analysis of certain

identity characteristics—race, birth-place and ethnicity—has no statistically significant effect of one's self-perceived attractiveness, thus refuting my hypothesis.

****Table 3 about here****

DISCUSSION

So, what does it take to be beautiful in America?

As uncovered from the research conducted in this study, one's race, birthplace and ethnic identity do not have a statistically significant influence on the respondent's perception of their own beauty. Despite American culture, for generations, supporting, if not encouraging, the privileges associated with identifying as White. Though inequality and inequity are significant problems plaguing American society, it appears that one's image of themselves when contrasted to the White standard of America does not have a significant effect. These findings support past literature. One in particular, found that Black women's self-esteem ratings were higher compared to their white peers in a college environment (Sprecher et al. 2013). Yet, the findings from this paper, dispute the findings found in nearly all the literature included in this study. Specifically, Bryant (2013) wrote extensively on how race plays a significant role in one's perception of beauty.

I proposed earlier in this paper that the theories—Group Position theory and Colourism—used to provide groundwork for my hypothesis could be interpreted to support my claim. That being, Non-White, Non-Western and those born outside the United States would see themselves as less attractive, as they do not look like the dominate White social group. However, upon analyzing the regression of the variables, my application of the theory for this research, unfortunately, does not work. I believed that people compare themselves to what is constantly declared as beautiful. Yet, people often compare themselves to those that are similar. Social

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

Comparison Theory, introduced by Leon Festinger (1958), had a premise that stated “The tendency to compare oneself with some other decreases as the difference in his opinion or ability and one’s own increases” (120). Using this idea, different racial and ethnic identities are completely incomparable, especially in the context of beauty, which my results concurred. Showing that people who describe as Non-White and as Non-Western do not frequently compare themselves to the white standard, or if they do, they do not see it as a viable comparison because of inimitable differences, which ultimately refutes my hypothesis.

These findings are intriguing as American culture has systematically, consciously or not, privileged Whiteness. Of the many presidents America has elected, one has been Black, or the representation of Black, Latinx and Asian actors being nominated for Awards is notoriously low, if they get nominated at all, for example the infamous “Whiteout” of the 2015-2016 Oscars (Buckley, 2016). America has been consistently challenged with the way race is approached and handled throughout the country. My goal was to show that the White European beauty standard was negatively impacting the self-perception of one’s beauty of Non-Whites living in America. But as the results from this study show, there is not a statistically significant relationship between these variables. This poses a few questions: Is White beauty no longer privileged in America? If so, then what is beautiful in a country that is fueled by the capital of attractiveness? Finally, has the standard of beauty changed to be more inclusive and diverse or has it disappeared?

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the American standard of beauty has historically favoured being White, blue-eyed, thin, and young. This specific set of requirements is limiting Americans to desire an unattainable standard of beauty. The research in this study examines the relationship between race, birth-place, ethnicity and self-rated attractiveness. I hypothesized that people born in the

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

United States and identify as White and with a Western culture will rate themselves as more attractive than those who are not born in the United States and identify as Non-White and with a Non-Western culture. Using the General Social Survey (2016), I had a sample size of 1,622 respondents who are non-institutionalized, English or Spanish speaking adults, who live in the United States. A multiple regression analysis results refuted my hypothesis.

My intent with this research was to study the effect of identify of self-rated attractiveness and to further the data and information on how the relationship between identity—race and such—and self-perceived beauty has evolved and changed. Although I predicted a different outcome, the null hypothesis produced an intriguing relationship. The results from the analysis hints at positive relationship of one's beauty and identifying with the White European standard. The regression analysis showed that identifying as Non-Western and those not born in the United States ranked themselves as being more attractive. Group Position Theory and Colourism were the theories I applied to help support my hypothesis. They examined how the social hierarchy system in America privileges Whiteness and thus will ultimately influence one's perception of their beauty. However, this application was contrasted by Social Comparison Theory, that hypothesized that comparison can only happen between those of similar ability, opinion and attractiveness. Furthermore, I wanted to reiterate that this study does not disprove the prominence of Colourism in American society.

Limitations

As this research evolved, a few limitations emerged. Including a variable that gives the many variations of gender, would have been more inclusive than the sex variable. The spectrum of genders that exist today are starting to be included in campaigns and on screen, however full representation of the spectrum is not complete yet. In addition, including more independent

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

variable such as a respondent's income and political beliefs could have potentially contributed to a different outcome. 2016 was a prominent political year, where the American population was polarized between two drastically different presidential candidates. Because my data was taken in the midst of the campaigns, I believe that the controversy of this specific presidential race would result in people of colour and immigrants feeling more isolated in America. Furthermore, I do not use a variable that measures a respondent's skin tone, instead I use a race variable as a proxy. As people have many different tones of complexion, the race variable provided a limited number of responses, thus limiting the results of my research. The addition of these variables would have resulted in this research have a more diverse and inclusive outcome. Ultimately, the limitations in this study slightly hindered me producing a more extensive project, but the findings from the regression analysis showed that Non-White, Non-American-Born, and Non-Western people are not deeply influence by the beauty standards that reside over Americans.

Future Research

Deriving from the limitations mentioned above, future research should elaborate upon my results. Including variables that depict one's political beliefs, income, social media usage and location could provide insight into how people see themselves in American society. Using a gender variable would be more inclusive and show the disparity of self-perceived beauty across the many genders. A skin-tone variable would more accurately fit with Colourism, a driving theory of this research. I also think exploring the complexities of white racial identities, as well as looking within the communities of colour to see if there is a hierarchy between racial groups. Additionally, future researchers should take into consideration the atmosphere of their study, as different results could come from studying beauty standards in the work place, education, and the military. Finally, drawing from the questions I proposed above, future research should adapt

AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

studies to fit the ever-changing American cultural norms and standards of attractiveness that dictate how Americans view beauty. Though my hypothesis was null, the implication of this study shows that people living in America are not, or no longer, comparing themselves to the idealized white standard.

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Table and Figures

Figure 1: Born in the US or NOT
(0= Yes, 1= No)

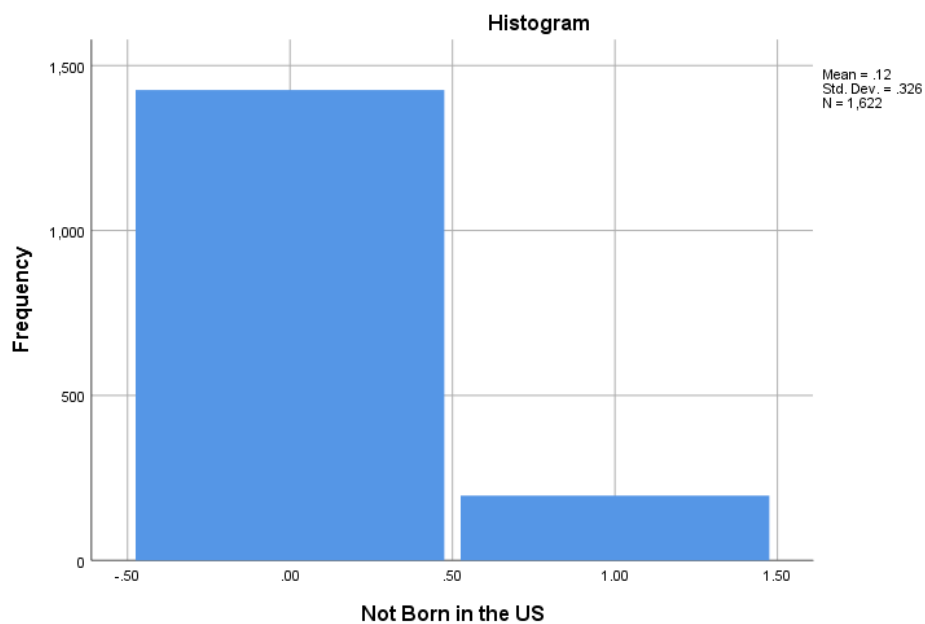
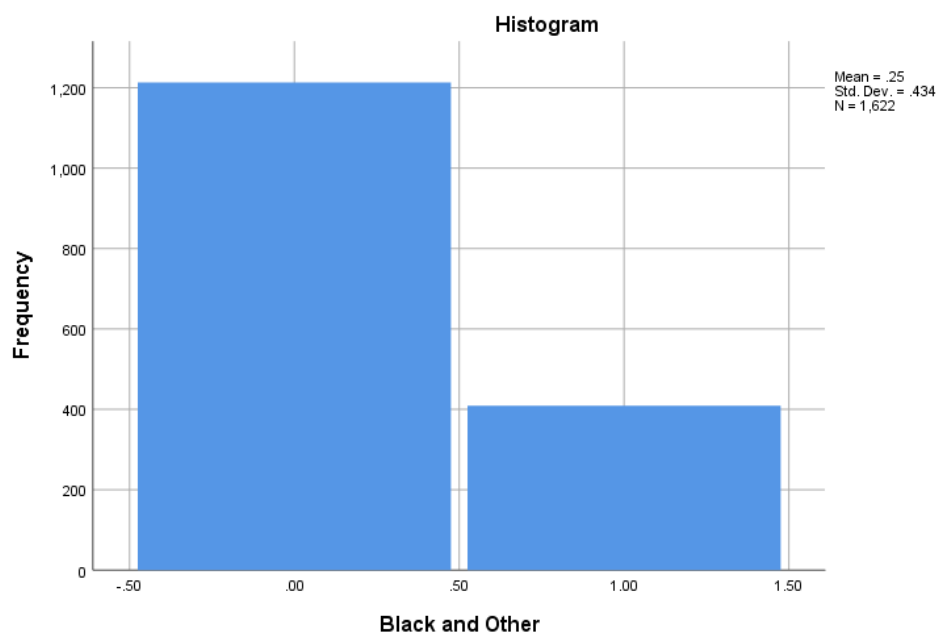


Figure 2: Race of Respondent
(0=White, 1=Non-White)



AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

Figure 3: Western or Non-Western
(0=Western, 1= Non-Western)

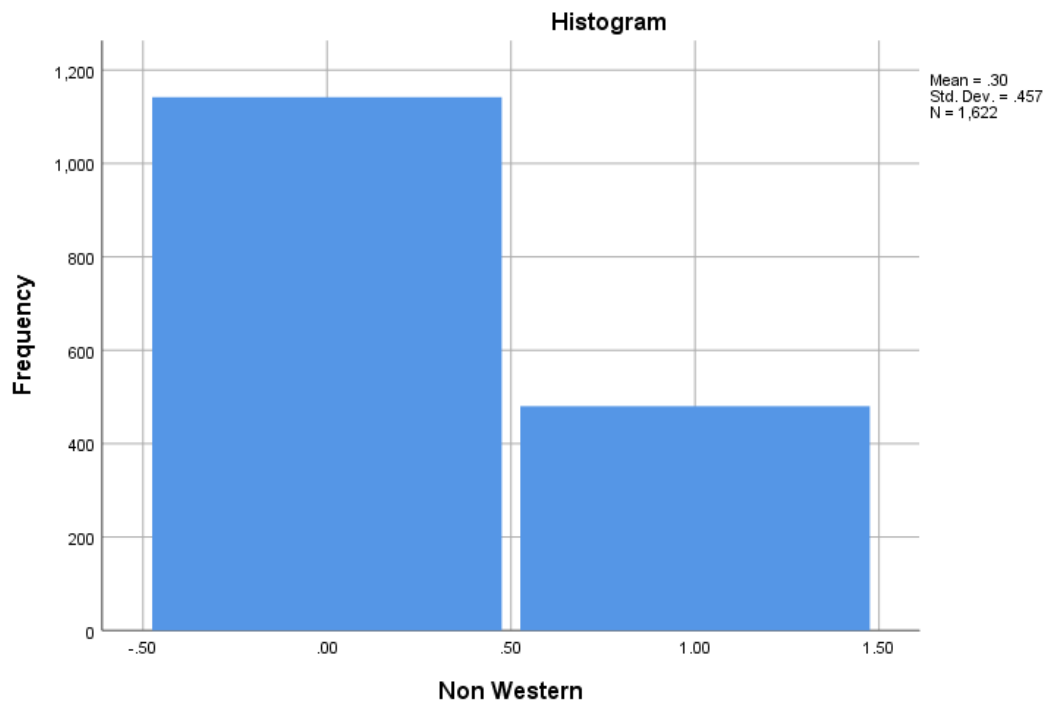


Figure 4: Respondent's Physical Attractiveness Rating
(1= Very Unattractive, 2= Unattractive, 3= About Average, 4= Attractive, 5= Very Attractive)

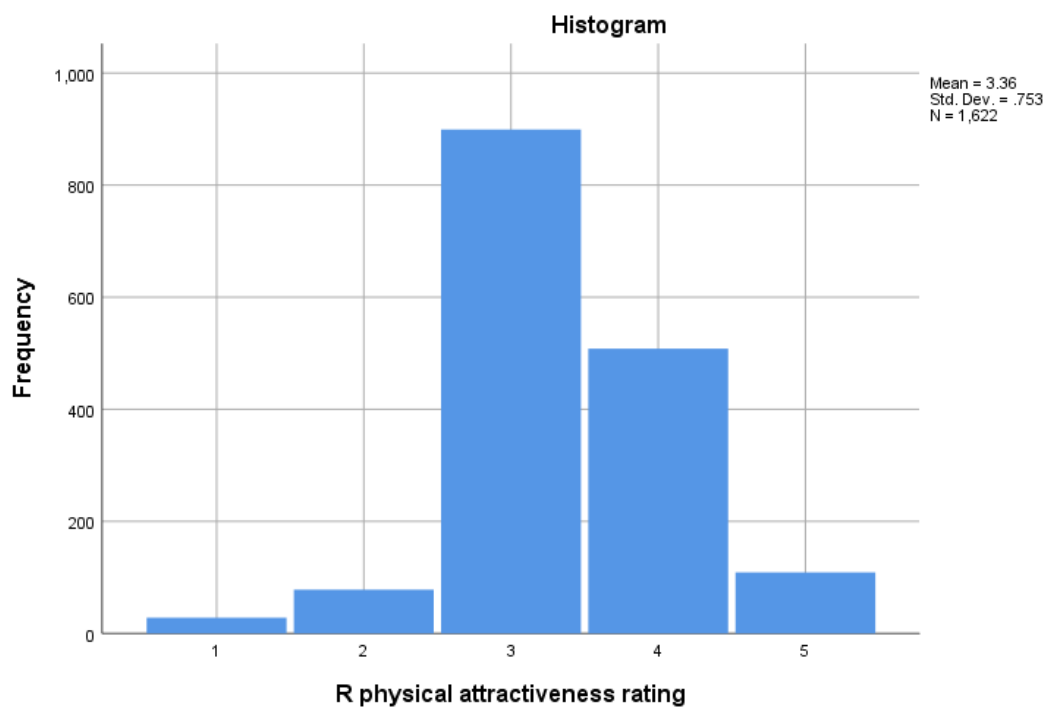


Figure 5: Age of Respondent

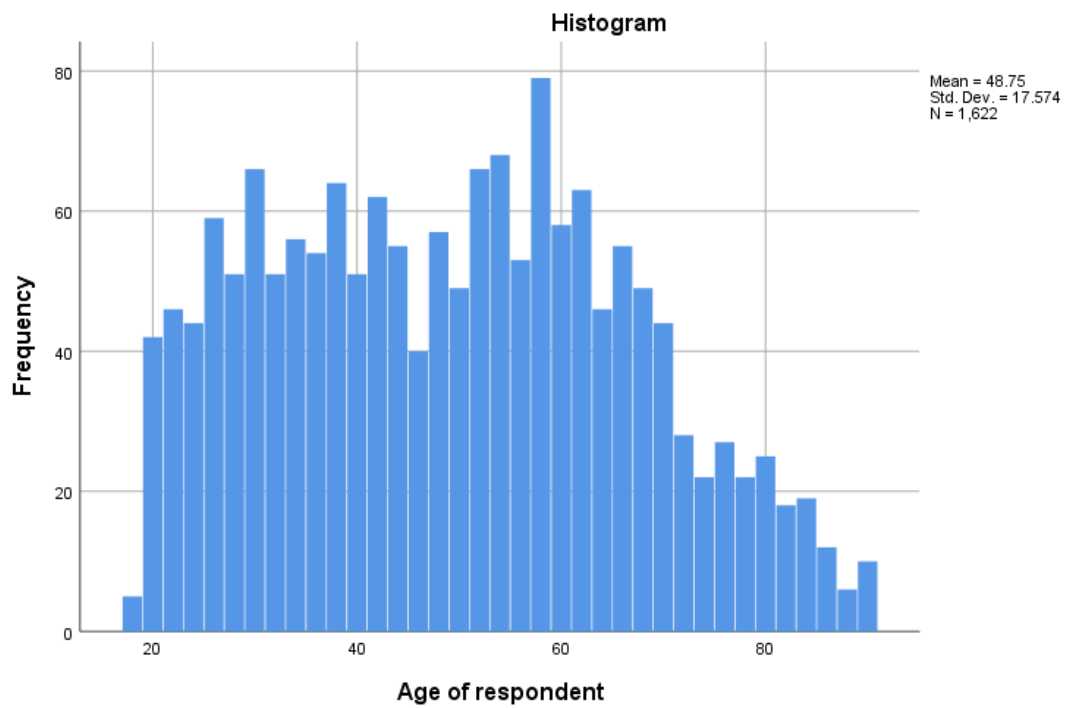


Figure 6: Sex of Respondent

(0=Male, 1=Female)

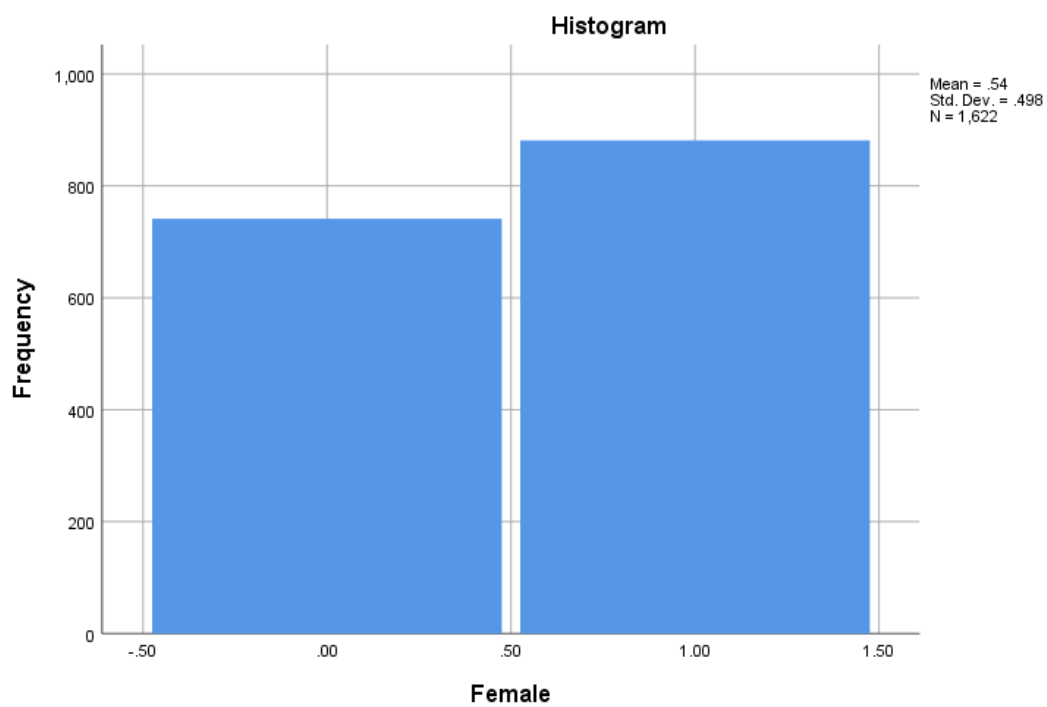


Table 1: Means, Medians and Standard Deviations for Variables (N=1622)

	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Independent Variables			
Were you Born in this Country (USA)?	.12	0	.326
Race of Respondent	.25	0	.434
Do you Identify with a Western or Non- Western Location (Ethnicity)?	.30	0	.457
Dependent Variables			
R's Physical Attractiveness Rating	3.36	3	.753
Control Variables			
Age of Respondent	48.75	49	17.574
Sex of Respondent	.54	0	.498

Table 2: Bivariate Analysis—Correlations between Physical Attractiveness and Five Variables (N= 1622)

	Non-Western	Not born in the USA	Non-White	Female	Age of Respondent
R Physical Attractiveness Rating	.021	.054	.001	.090*	0.193*
Non-Western		.236*	.647*	-.013	-.183*
Not born in the USA			.207*	.017	-.068*
Non-White				.017	-.188*
Female					.053

*p>.01

Table 3: Regression of R's Physical Attractiveness Rating on All Variables

	b	β
Non-Western	.015	.009
Not Born in the US	.110	.047
Non-White	-.094	-.054
Female	.152	.101*
Age of Respondent	-.009	-.204*
Constant	3.714	
R ² =.051; F(5,1616)=17.363; p<.01		
* p<.01		